

University of New Hampshire University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository

Media Relations

Administrative Offices

4-27-2009

UNH Research: Prima Donnas Cause More Conflict At Work: Ranks Rising Among Younger Workers

Lori Wright
UNH Media Relations

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.unh.edu/news>

Recommended Citation

Wright, Lori, "UNH Research: Prima Donnas Cause More Conflict At Work: Ranks Rising Among Younger Workers" (2009). *UNH Today*. 70.
<https://scholars.unh.edu/news/70>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Administrative Offices at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Media Relations by an authorized administrator of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact nicole.hentz@unh.edu.



UNH Research: Prima Donnas Cause More Conflict At Work

Ranks Rising Among Younger Workers

Media Contact: [Lori Wright](#)

603-862-0574

UNH Media Relations

April 27, 2009

EDITORS AND REPORTERS: Prof. Paul Harvey can be reached at paul.harvey@unh.edu and 603-862-3301.

FULL RESEARCH ARTICLE: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/121391007/PDFSTART>.

PHOTO: <http://www.unh.edu/news/img/harvey.jpg>

DURHAM, N.H. – New research from the University of New Hampshire shows that employees who feel entitled to undeserved preferential treatment are more prone to get into workplace conflicts and less likely to enjoy their job. And the number of entitlement-minded workers is on the rise among younger workers.

Paul Harvey, assistant professor of management at the University of New Hampshire, details the research results in the latest issue of the Journal of Organizational Behavior in the article "An empirical examination of the role of attributions in psychological entitlement and its outcomes."

According to Harvey and co-author Mark Martinko at Florida State University, people who feel entitled to preferential treatment more often than not exhibit self-serving attributional styles -- the tendency to take credit for good outcomes and blame others when things go wrong. And people with self-serving attributional styles are less happy in their jobs and more apt to cause conflict in the workplace, especially with their supervisors.

Self-serving attributional styles thrive in environments with a high level of ambiguity, Harvey says. One way to help combat a coworker with a self-serving bias is to document and collect evidence that may be useful in establishing who is responsible for positive and negative results.

"If you fear a coworker might take credit for something good you've done, it's smart to keep evidence of your involvement in the outcome. For example, an email from a stakeholder thanking you for your effort or performance on a task that can be used to refute the claims of a coworker trying to take credit for what you have accomplished," Harvey says.

"It's also important to remember that even relatively objective people often have a slight self-serving bias. So before engaging a coworker for blaming you for a problem you feel you did not create or taking credit for a good outcome you think you are responsible for, it might be smart to make sure you're being totally honest with yourself, too," he says.

And according to Harvey, younger workers such as "Generation Y" employees are more apt to feel entitled.



"Managers have reported a lot of problems associated with this – primarily that these employees have unrealistic expectations and a strong resistance toward accepting negative feedback. Basically entitlement involves having an inflated view of oneself, and managers are finding that younger employees are often very resistant to anything that doesn't involve praise and rewards," Harvey says.

When it comes to the recent corporate scandals, Harvey says that entitlement attitudes may play a part in them. Entitlement is often thought of as a component of narcissism. Narcissists believe that they are worthy of a certain level of respect and rewards, and they are determined to get that level of respect and reward, no matter what. According to Harvey, there may be a link between narcissistic mentality and recent corporate scandals.

"A great source of frustration for people with a strong sense of entitlement is unmet expectations. They often feel entitled to a level of respect and rewards that aren't in line with their actual ability and effort levels, and so they might not get the level of respect and rewards they are expecting. They feel cheated and might try to obtain rewards they feel they are entitled to through unconventional, unethical means. This might involve behaviors like manipulating performance data to achieve higher bonuses, which have been linked to many of the problems we've seen recently," Harvey says.

Harvey advises supervisors to remove as much ambiguity from situations as possible so that employees are less apt to form biased judgments. To the extent possible, document who does what so that credit and blame can be accurately determined. He also suggests supervisors make sure everyone understands the organizational structure so that they understand who is responsible for what.

Harvey suggests employers screen the entitlement levels of would-be hires. There are a number of ways employers could screen the entitlement levels of would-be hires, such as through surveys or interview questions, he says. For example, a hiring manager could ask a prospective employee the following: "Do you feel you are generally superior to your coworkers/classmates/etc., and if so, why?"

"If the candidate answers yes to the first part but struggles with the 'why,' there may be an entitlement issue. This is because entitlement perceptions are often based on an unfounded sense of superiority and deservingness. They've been led to believe, perhaps through overzealous self-esteem building exercises in their youth, that they are somehow special but often lack any real justification for this belief," Harvey says.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 11,800 undergraduate and 2,400 graduate students.

-30-

